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MARTHA MARBLEHEAD:
The Maid and Matron of Chelem.

By MRS. A. J. DUNWAY,
AUTHOR OF "JUDITH REED," "ELLEN DOWD,"
"AMIE AND HENRY REED," "THE HAPPY
HOME," "ONE WOMAN'S SPORE,"
"MADGE HARRISON,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

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CHAPTER XXIX.

"You must loan me a few hundred dollars," wrote Martha to Colonel Augustus Marblehead, "else I will go to Salem and hire a room beside a Chinaman and start an opposition wash-house."

"Confound it!" said the honorable gentleman, as he passed the letter over to his wife, "that woman will disgrace the entire family yet."

"On the contrary, my dear, I should say she's an honor to us. I never think of her trials and struggles but my heart aches. If you can help her you must, and I'm sure I know of no reason why you can't."

"Every man has enough to do to take care of his own family."

"But every man doesn't do his duty in that direction, by great odds. It seems strange to me to see a man with as good judgment concerning other things as you possess so sadly at sea upon the woman question."

"What now?"

"You act as if you think every other woman in the country ought to be satisfied, no matter what her circumstances, because Martha Brown got a good husband who holds office, and whose name is Gus Marblehead."

"One woman ought to be satisfied, at least," said Gus.

"So she is, with herself and her own condition, but not with the circumstances of women whose husbands are either incapable, or unwilling to do their duty."

"Well, pet, here's a check for a cool five hundred. I was going to buy that farm over the river as soon as the mortgage is up for foreclosure, but one can never do as he pleases when he has poor relations."

"And you've just about as much use for that farm as I have for Cheops, or the Pyramids," laughed the little wife, saucily.

She had been reading history, ancient and modern, and her comparisons were colored with its teachings.

Colonel Augustus Marblehead smiled dryly. He knew she had told the truth.

"Narrow us down to what we can use, with all the usual luxuries thrown in, and we can fare well and have few destitute relations," continued the little wife.

"I know, but that kind of logic never builds colossal fortunes," replied the Colonel.

"And, really, nobody ever needs 'em," was the quick rejoinder. "Of what use is a colossal fortune to anybody?"

"Mooch, every way. It endows colleges, builds churches, advances civilization, brings honor to its possessor, and enables him to become a philanthropist."

"I wish I could unravel the private history of every great philanthropist, Gus. I've no doubt but they've all missed opportunity to do good to those around them, in a quiet, unostentatious way that, if properly accepted and profitably acted upon, would have kept them from building colossal fortunes for heirs or legatees to quarrel over."

"Is Martha coming here?" asked the Colonel, abruptly.

Somewhat there was unanswerable logic in his little wife's peculiar idiosyncrasies, and he generally found it easier to change the subject than to hold his point when she began her moralizings.

"I shall write, asking her to come."

"I wouldn't."

"Why?"

"Women can't understand these things, little wife. The new nominating convention meets here very soon, and I don't want to cripple my chances by harboring poor relations, especially when they're under the social ban of grass widowhood."

"I'm just as ambitious as you are, my husband. I want you to have place and power, seeing you relish it so much, and I would do anything honorable to assist your 'chances,' as you term them. But no man ever gained any lasting honor by selfishness or cowardice. Retribution is one of nature's immutable laws."

"I gave you five hundred dollars for her, and that's enough, my dear. Don't bore me with any more of this business."

So the sister-in-law, her brown eyes brimming with tears, and her heart heavy with a sense of humiliation, which, for her husband's sake, she was determined to conceal, retired to her chamber and wrote to the distressed but by no means exceptional modern Rachel, enclosing the check, and saying, with a bit of pardonable feminine vanity and deception, "I'm so sorry you won't have time to visit us before leaving for Montana. But I know how anxious you are to make haste to meet your birdlings, and I shall not expect you. Be of good cheer, and if at any time I can assist you, let me know, and I will

ever be ready to do for you what I can in my power. My prayers and blessings shall be with you."

"Not a word from Gus, and yet he ought to write, if but to make me feel that he cares for me, just a little," said Martha, as, depositing her money in a safe hiding-place, she busied her mind and body in hurried preparations for her forthcoming flight.

This modern Rachel was not without filial affection. Her father's very helplessness was a strong tie that bound her to him; and, but for the last unkindness cut, which separated her, through his personal selfishness, from the children of her peril, she would have cared for him while his life lasted without one grudging thought or deed.

For the last time Martha disrobed the trembling Major, and listened to his garish complaints in silence. Because she had not fulfilled her threat to go when the children were taken, he had concluded that she would remain; so, all unconscious of her pending flight, he scolded, as was his wont, till balmy sleep overtook him, and the somnolent snoring that had been his nocturnal habit for half a century loudly asserted that his senses were in repose.

Martha stood bending tenderly over the old man's prostrate form for a season, and her tears fell thick and fast.

Woman naturally needs something to cling to, somebody to love. The abuse of thousands of years of womanly affection has failed to crush out this innate attribute, this emanation of the divine that she inhales and expresses.

"Who will care for the old man when I am gone?" she asked, half audibly.

Then, as though the question had been satisfactorily answered through her inner consciousness, she smoothed the bed-clothes tenderly over the sleeper, as a mother might, and imprinting a kiss upon his furrowed brow that had more of the instinct of the mother than the daughter in it, she gathered up her little bundle of clothing and started out in the wide, wide world, alone.

The recent moon hung low to the heavens, with his horns downward, as if in mourning. The stars beamed upon her with a cheerless radiance, and the fire sighed farewell. The old house dog, who, since the departure of her children, had refused to be comforted, was startled from his fitful slumbers, and essayed to follow her, whining piteously.

"Go back, Ring, and stay with grandfather," she said, stooping to caress his shaggy coat, and bursting into tears that, till now, had been denied her.

"Ring, poor fellow, there's no selfishness in your affection," she exclaimed, through her sobs. "You would love me still, though you knew you'd never gain anything by it. But, good fellow, and take good care of grandfather. He has nobody now but you."

The faithful dog whined a mournful acquiescence, and returned, with drooping head, to the old door-step, where he howled till long after midnight, mourning as only a faithful dog can mourn for friends that have died or deserted him, but for whom he would have died had they but let him.

Why Martha chose the night for her departure she could not for her life have told. There was nothing to hinder her from going where she pleased, since she had the necessary funds for present personal expenses at command; but she consoled herself with the idea that a desire to save a scene with her father was the motive that had prompted the act.

All night long she wandered on the high road. Sometimes the awful stillness of the deep evergreen woods was broken by a falling limb, or the crackling of the thicket, through which a deer or rabbit ran, would startle her; but these disturbances were for an instant only.

"I'll reach the base of the Cascades by noon to-morrow, and then I'll take stage for my destination," she said, over and over again, as if the assertion might revive her courage.

But the way was longer than she had imagined. Sometimes I wonder if there isn't a heaven for the faithful horse. If there isn't, I am sure there ought to be, for certainly, were it not for him, his younger brother, man, would have great need to double his pedal extremities and elongate his spinal vertebrae to enable him to perform, on all fours, the work the equine quadruped performs for him without a murmur or a protest.

Martha did not reach her destination as a pedestrian the next day, nor the next. But she found lodgings at night at wayside country homes, and in one instance met an experience that she felt was much needed by her in her present tribulation, as a lesson of importance.

The mother where she obtained lodgings on the second evening, and when, footsore and weary, she was almost ready to drop with fatigue and discouragement, was the sole support of a brood of little ones, and was herself a pale, puny, black-bent consumptive, who was staggering about the wretched cabin, performing labor far beyond her strength, and attending constantly upon the wants of the little ones. To the number of the last another was added during the night, while the husband and father was in a drunken revel, so long indulged in that *deterium tremens* had possession of both brain and body, and he made night hideous with his demoniac yells.

"Some angel must have guided you to me," said the trial-burdened victim of one lord and master's rule, "for my children are not old enough to go to a neighbor for a week to get James sober, but he's so cross I'm afraid to say too much, though he's never ugly unless he's drinking."

And while the mother was thus speaking, her pain-pinched features lighted up with a sanctified smile, born of a trust in the Infinite and Invisible, that Martha could remember as having sometimes come to her in the past, though she could not realize it now.

"Have you any babies?"

And the mother looked lovingly into the tiny red face of the infant upon her bosom, with a heart big enough to love and care for it, even though her cup were already more than full.

"My husband went off and left me, and then sued me at the law and took my babies, too," was the reply.

"I often wish James would go off and leave me, but it would be awful if he should take the children, too. Wouldn't it, now?"

"He'd do it, unless you had money to try the validity of the law; and then he would take your money if you earned it yourself. A woman may keep or spend the property her father bequeaths her, but if she earns it with her own hands it belongs to her husband."

"Is there any way I could get rid of James? I feel as if I might take care of these babies—I have five now—but I don't see how I could put food in the mouths of any more."

"Alas, dear stricken sister, I cannot advise you. Your lot is even worse than mine. But, then, you loved your husband in the beginning, didn't you?"

"Why, certainly! Why else should I have married him?"

Martha blushed scarlet.

"Why, indeed, should any woman marry, save for love?" she thought.

Ah, me!

Echo another, Why?

The consumptive mother was made as comfortable as Martha knew how to make her under the unpropitious circumstances, and then, heart-sick almost to dying, she threw herself upon the trundle bed apportioned the children of her delicious host, and sank into a fitful slumber.

She dreamed that a hundred years passed away, and through them all she toiled and climbed the lonely steep of unloved, unappreciated life. So real was her dream that she felt herself grow old and gray; and then she thought she died. She saw friends that she had never known around her mortal remains, and heard the sobs of lamentation to which they gave utterance, and, strange to say, felt more keenly than ever before the throbbings of an existence which she now knew to be eternal.

Though those around her seemed to know it not. After a little while she was borne away upon the invisible current of neutral-tinted ether, in which she swam, as a swan, the mellow colors exhilarating her senses, and the breath of sweetest perfumes filling her being with a delicious languor, but for which she would have gone wild in a delirium of ecstasy. After a while, it seemed only a very little while, she felt herself descending, though still buoyant and quietly exultant. In her dream she wondered why she was not afraid. Presently a very little opening was made, as by an unseen hand, in a pale, rose-tinted cloud, through which she entered, and behold! There lay before her a seemingly boundless, slightly undulating plain, where homes and happiness abounded, and where no tyranny or wickedness could enter. Groups of sunny-faced children played in fairy gardens. Men and women worked or read or sang or chatted as the mood best suited them, but all seemed governed by the eternal law of liberty and love. She drew near to a group of earnest counselors, to whom she was strangely invisible, and beseeched to their words.

"There was a time, my children," said a venerable and yet youthful appearing sage, "when men held the destiny of woman in the very hollow of their hands. They made laws without consulting her, and administered them according to their own conception, without listening to her demands for personal consideration. They ruled so badly that they wronged not only woman, but themselves and their children. But all of this is past. Woman, the mother of humanity, is now the arbiter of her own destiny, and the earth is beginning to reap the fruit of better things. Right, and not might, is now the law that rules, and man is learning to bow reverently at the foot of womanhood, and worship understanding at the shrine of maternity. Per consequence, the world is better, manhood is nobler, childhood is grander, and womanhood is glorified. Time was when these things were not so. Time was when man could rob woman of her earnings, trample ruthlessly upon her maternal domain, tear her children from her embrace, or, worse still, inflict upon her the balefulness of a domestic tyranny which well might transform an angel to a demon."

A sudden crash awoke the dreamer, and she opened her eyes and beheld the infuriated victim of *deterium tremens* standing over the bed where the helpless mother lay, the rickety bed which he had shaken down in his drunken

fury, and he was in the act of striking her with his clenched fist, while the poor wife begged piteously for her thwarted, ruined life.

Arising with a strength born of sudden danger, Martha caught the uplifted hand and stayed the blow. Affrighted at the sudden turn in affairs, the monster turned away in terror, and ran off into the woods though pursued, as indeed he was, by demons.

Martha soothed the suffering mother, put things to rights again as best she could, and by high noon of the following day was on her road again, this time an inmate of the *diligence* in which she had last beheld her little ones.

"I have seen in my dream that God will yet bring order out of confusion," she said, as, resigning herself to her solitary ride, she lived the dream over and over again, a dream in which, above all else, though she had not seen, but felt it, beamed the radiant, loving face of Kingston Greensborough.

[To be continued.]

Common Sense.

Mrs. Sara Spencer well says: "There is a great deal to be said for the overtaxed, debilitated, shattered condition of the struggling mothers of large poor families in this country; but I have often wished, when men talk to women of their duty to the next generation, and the urgent necessity of keeping in their proper sphere, that women would answer with one accord, 'We will not have any next generation unless we can improve the quality of this.' Our statistics have shown that more than two millions of children have been born, and are now living in this country, whom the whole world declares unfit to live, born to a heritage of suffering, vice and crime. In the last census there seems to be a hint of lamentation that the liberation of the African race had put an end to slave breeding by white masters, on the plantations, so that their children, instead of being sold, only, of more than half a million. What a loss to this Republic! Men can no longer make money by selling their own children, and have therefore lost their chief motive for increasing the population of their native land! It is damning, would I could say it has fully dawned, upon the minds of American women that it is high time that we take notice of the quality of the life, and the health of the children of our race. Let us declare that the one who suffers all the agony, even unto death, that attends the advent of a human soul, shall decide where and under what conditions that immortal life shall be lived into existence. Let us declare that no child born of us shall inherit traits of character that ought not to be perpetuated; that not only in nerve and muscle, but in the quality of the life, in education, heart and brain, our children shall inherit of the choicest and best, but that the soul residing within shall have the richer inheritance that only noble souls can begeth to their children. Do you tell me that you cannot control the conditions of motherhood; that the houses in which you dwell, the clothes you wear, the food you eat, the very bodies of the children you live, belong by statute law, and in fact, to your husbands. Let us declare that the one who suffers all the agony, even unto death, that attends the advent of a human soul, shall decide where and under what conditions that immortal life shall be lived into existence. Let us declare that no child born of us shall inherit traits of character that ought not to be perpetuated; that not only in nerve and muscle, but in the quality of the life, in education, heart and brain, our children shall inherit of the choicest and best, but that the soul residing within shall have the richer inheritance that only noble souls can begeth to their children. 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